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**KNOWLES, MAT-SU MAYORS BREAK GROUND**  
**ON PARKS GLENN INTERCHANGE**

***\$45 Million Project to Ease Traffic Flow to Wasilla, Palmer***

WASILLA--Eager to ease traffic congestion to and from the Mat-Su, Gov. Tony Knowles joined Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Commissioner Joe Perkins and several local mayors in breaking ground on construction of a new \$45 million Glenn-Parks highway interchange.

"The project we are kicking off today builds on several of our transportation initiatives by providing for the non-stop, free flow of traffic into the communities of Wasilla and Palmer and eliminating another dangerous at-grade highway and rail crossing," Knowles said.

The Glenn-Parks Interchange, located at the intersection of the Glenn and Parks Highway in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, will greatly enhance the safety of the traveling public who use these corridors to commute to work, to enjoy recreation opportunities and for commercial purposes. The two highways also serve as commercial lifelines to Interior Alaska, Fairbanks and the North Slope.

Knowles also noted that the project was designed to protect important salmon spawning habitat in the area. "DOT worked closely with the Department of Fish and Game and the Army Corps of Engineers to obtain the permits that ensure that this major project has the smallest impact possible on this important habitat," Knowles said. "When completed, we will have both an interchange and habitat for the salmon. I can't think of a better example of 'doing it right'."

The project builds on substantial transportation improvements for the Mat-Su Valley. Between 1988 and 1994, the state invested \$62 million on road projects in Mat-Su. Since 1995 and including the Glenn Highway Miles 100-109 and the Knik Goose Bay Road, which will be under contract in September, the Knowles-Ulmer Administration will have spent \$345 million on Mat-Su area transportation projects.

The interchange project is funded by a special \$50 million congressional appropriation secured by U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, and was bid as a design-build project to allow design to take place hand in hand with construction. As one portion of the design is completed, construction of that portion can begin.

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The design-build contract will allow for a compressed schedule and an earlier completion date. Kiewit Pacific Corporation, the construction contractor, intends to initiate construction this summer with project completion scheduled for October 1, 2004.

During the ceremony, Knowles took note that the state's part of the National Highway System is in better shape today than at any other time in Alaska history.

"During the last seven years alone, we have upgraded approximately 210 miles of substandard highway to current national standards," Knowles said. "These upgrades have made highways safer and cut travel times, particularly between Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley, and the Kenai Peninsula."

The Governor noted that changes in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, known as the STIP, allowed communities to nominate projects for funding, established a scoring and ranking process for evaluating those projects, and provided many opportunities for public involvement in that process.

"Since then, we have programmed in about 2.6 billion dollars in highway and trail improvements," Knowles said. "This system has gained wide acceptance from local governments as a fair way of distributing our transportation dollars. In fact, so much so that we recently established the system in regulation."

Knowles also noted that we have also been improving the safety of our highways by grade separating our railroad crossings, and, since 1995 have added six new railroad-highway overpasses to prevent car and train collisions.

Knowles was joined in today's ceremony by mayors Tim Anderson of the Mat-Su Borough, Sarah Palin of Wasilla, and Jim Cooper of Palmer.